



Learning Tool 13

Alternative Response Systems

Background

Since the formal inception of alternative response with the first state statute to codify the practice of the *Family Assessment and Response System* (Missouri SB595 1993), a clear understanding of this approach has been challenged by the lack of common terminology and definition¹ and the lack of awareness of core elements²

As has been the case in other practice innovations, such as family preservation, states have embraced a significant change in the way in which they relate to families and their needs using different terminology, different definitions, different models, different services, different service providers, and the continuous evolution of this practice.

Alternative Response (AR) is referred to by a variety of names including family assessment systems, dual track, differential response, multiple tracks, and multiple others. Regardless of the specific terminology used by states, the rationale for this approach is to offer flexibility to tailor the child protection response to the needs and circumstances of the family, to partner with families early and collaboratively rather than waiting for serious harm to occur and to remove fault finding from the differential response in order to increase the possibility of parent engagement and ultimately child safety.

Viewed in this manner, Alternative Response is the intersection between the prevention of child maltreatment and the intervention by the formal child protection agency. Moreover, the reauthorization of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act in 2003 required that child protective services agencies develop triage procedures to refer children not at imminent risk of harm to community organizations or voluntary preventive services.

¹ An approach that allows child protective services to respond differently to accepted reports of child abuse and neglect; A formal response of the agency that assesses the needs of the child or family without requiring a determination that maltreatment has occurred or that the child is at risk of maltreatment [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2003]; Services provided to families without a formal determination of abuse or neglect or labeling someone as a perpetrator and listing them in the state's central child abuse registry. [CWLA, 2005]

² Core Elements= Use of two or more discrete responses to reports of maltreatment that are screened in and accepted; assignment to response pathways is determined by an array of safety and risk factors; original response assignments can be changed; ability of families who receive a non-investigatory response to accept or refuse the offered services after an assessment without consequences; establishment of discrete responses is codified in statute, policy, and/or protocols; after an assessment, services are voluntary for families who receive a non-investigatory response (as long as child safety is not compromised); no substantiation of alleged maltreatment and services are offered without formal determination that child maltreatment has occurred; and use of central registry is dependent upon type of response.



As such, this new requirement provides a great opportunity for collaboration between the providers of community-based child abuse prevention (CBCAP) services and staff of the child welfare agency³. Ideally, CBCAP lead agencies have an important role in providing input during the development of the triage and AR systems and participate in the planning process with the child welfare agency as their partners.⁴

Key Informants

On April 17, 2007 at the 2007 CBCAP/PSSF Grantees Meeting in Portland, Oregon, a joint session of grantees of Community Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP), Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSF), the State Liaison Officers (SLO), and the Children’s Justice Act (CJA) was convened. This session provided a brief overview of Alternative Response across the nation and a description of selected statutory, policy, practice, service and data dimensions. The impetus for this presentation and subsequent discussion by participants was the CBCAP Grantees’ interests and needs for additional information about Alternative Response and to obtain insights into the grantees’ current level of involvement. In addition, this joint forum, in which the CBCAP, PSSF, SLO, and CJA representatives were together, had the potential to facilitate collective discussion and collaboration in this area.

Forty states were represented at this meeting by at least one of the four stakeholders and thirty one states were represented by CBCAP grantees. Participants were requested to provide information on several key themes: involvement with alternative response and other child protective services (CPS) innovations; ways to expand involvement on both individual and collective levels, and needs for support and technical assistance. The information provided in this fact sheet is based on the responses of these Grantee Meeting participants.

Involvement with ARS/CPS Innovations

State representatives were asked to identify the type(s) of involvement that they had with Alternative Response Systems associated with the child welfare agency and/or innovations associated with any other auspice outside the child welfare agency. The written question provided respondents with four examples of such involvement – provision of services, funding, training, and technical assistance. Perhaps expected, most respondents provided one or more of these exemplars in their answers and these were the dominant responses among respondents. Therefore, there was nominal original language in these responses.

Four states (Florida, Maryland, Nevada, & Ohio) indicated involvement with the piloting of alternative response systems in their state; three states (District of Columbia – Family Team Meeting, Illinois–Family Group Conferencing; Maryland – Family Team Meeting); indicated involvement with some type of family meeting; three states (New York, Vermont and Wisconsin) indicated some type of involvement with legislation.

Several states (Alabama, Maryland, Massachusetts, and Michigan) mentioned participation in collaborative bodies as a method of involvement.

It is apparent that quite a number of states identified some type of involvement with the AR systems or other innovations in their states, and that is to be commended. Unfortunately, it is not possible to determine the scope of this involvement and whether the activities and methods of involvement are the most strategic way of engagement in this innovative approach. In addition, in order to determine whether the responses describe the involvement of CBCAP lead agencies as opposed to the activities of the PSSF, SLO, and/or CJA, more detail is needed from CBCAP lead agencies. Given that these responses were generated from group discussions, it is not possible to state for certain that CBCAP lead agencies have this extent of involvement with the child protection innovations including Alternative Response.

³ The 2003 CAPTA amendments require CPS to implement “triage procedures” for appropriate referrals of children who are found by CPS not to be at risk of imminent harm to a “community organization or voluntary preventive service” as an eligibility requirement for the Basic State Grants.

⁴ Funds received by CBCAP grantees cannot be used to serve families who have open child welfare cases, identifying viable intersections is less than straightforward.

Expanding Involvement– Individual and Collective

Of the 40 states⁵ represented, there were several dominant themes that identified ways in which respondents could become involved or further involved, both individually and collectively, in innovative child protection practices including Alternative Response Systems. The themes of possible involvement overlap with the types of current involvement detailed in the former section—funding, technical assistance, training, provision of services, and collaboration. The state-specific responses are detailed in the chart below.

Ways to Expand Involvement	
AZ	Start with education for all agency departments/professionals; draft statutory authorization & policies/procedures for engaging community and support of families.
CO	Training and technical assistance
DE	Bring back protective service units to address issues of neglect
DC	Need AR for underage youth who are living on their own and don't want CPS involvement and cannot return home
GA	Formal protocols for coordination and referral to community based services funded through PSSF/CBCAP
ID	More conversation between PSSF and H & W to promote understanding and identify how best to collaborate.
KS	Funding and TA in providing primary/preventive services & TA on community collaboration and assessment
KY	Participate in solicitation of service providers; enhance referral process; solicit funding for program development
LA	Assist with community based services
MD	Become part of the statewide advisory group; invite CBCAP state lead to be a participant.
MA	Need time to sustain level of involvement and address challenges in involving the right number/type of stakeholders
MN	Coordinate, planning, reporting, resources to serve families as early as possible in culturally competent approaches.
MO	Explore ways to energize staff (12 years of AR)
NE	Remain active in current projects, monitor pilot projects and support replication.
NV	Offer feedback, provide input and emphasize collaboration
NH	Public advocacy for primary and secondary community-based prevention programs; public awareness about availability of services for families in need
NJ	Role for provider service community; DPCP provide training on prevention and community collaboration & issue RFP for Family Success Centers
NM	Collaboration and coordination among CBCAP, PSSF and the courts.
NY	CBCAP could provide services
NC	Better understanding of implications in using ARS – statutory authority, research on efficacy.
ND	Additional collaboration with service providers
RI	Focus on service needs from CPS and working to develop programs through CBCAP/PSSF to strengthen families and work toward development of Family/Community System of Care for wraparound support.
UT	More alternatives are needed to court mandated services.
VT	Work toward further reform of statutes related to investigation of child abuse and provision of services
WA	Increase investment in EBPs and discussion with CWS & TANF regarding how referrals from these systems are managed and prioritized
WI	Collaborating with community partners and child welfare stakeholders will be critical
WY	Assist in informing county offices know of services and costs

⁵ Seven states (AL, IA, MI, OK, TX, VA & WV) did not provide any response to this item.

Support and Technical Assistance Needed

State respondents were asked to identify their needs for supports and technical assistance. Of the 40 state respondents, 7 states (AK, HI, IA, KY, MI, NE, and NY) did not respond to this item. Five states (Delaware, Idaho, Minnesota, Virginia, and Wyoming) indicated the need for funding/support from the local, state, and/or federal governments. Six states indicated that they desired assistance from the Children’s Bureau National Resource Centers. Of these six, four states (Kansas, Rhode Island, Maryland and Wisconsin) mentioned the provision of assistance by the National Resource Center for Child Protective Services (NRC).

NRC-CPS is providing technical assistance and training in the development of MRS including design pieces of RFP for community services, cost of services and quality assurance. Alabama identified the assistance provided by Alicia Luckie, FRIENDS National Resource Center, in learning about best practices of other states and the potential of FRIENDS to continue to share examples from other states. Several states expressed their desire for information related to the research, evaluation, outcomes and accountability (Illinois, Louisiana, Oregon) of Alternative Response and the need for understanding the implications for its use given the Child and Family Services Reviews (Arizona and North Dakota). Both Colorado and Vermont expressed the desire for information about the need for policy changes and the management of these policy changes. Missouri, the first state to launch an Alternative Response System, noted that staff needed to be re-energized after 12 years of practicing this approach and ways to do so needed to be identified.

Summary

As we try to gauge the understanding and involvement of CBCAP lead agencies with child protection agencies that have adopted an alternative response system or some other practice innovation, it is important to remember that these data represent the views/responses of only 60% of all CBCAP lead agencies. Therefore, whatever conclusions are drawn from these data, they are limited to those state CBCAP agencies that provided information.

Conclusions

Lack of clarity and different conceptions of Alternative Response continue to exist among CBCAP agencies as to whether or not their individual states provide an alternative approach to accepted reports of maltreatment in addition to the traditional investigatory response. This lack of clarity is certain to hamper an ability to participate in these efforts. For those state representatives who are involved in AR approaches with their corresponding child welfare organizations, there are three predominant modes of involvement – funding, training, and technical assistance.

Recommendations

There appears much room for growth in the involvement between the CBCAP lead agencies and the child welfare agencies in areas pertaining to AR. Although it appears obvious, the potential partnership begins by initiating and sustaining a connection with the agency in which involvement is desired. Since there remains a lack of clarity in some instances, discourse between principal parties is an imperative. Much like the CBCAP and the PSSF grantees have forged a collaborative relationship and are convening joint meetings, perhaps the NRC-CPS can assist in bringing the CPS Directors and Administrators and the CBCAP lead agencies together—as partners—to begin forging an essential relationship. Through such a vehicle, definitional clarity can be achieved and participation in practice innovations in child protection can meet the goals of all stakeholders.

The most effective way to meet the challenge of preventing child abuse and neglect is for all child abuse prevention and treatment programs, public and private, to work together in partnership with families and other disciplines, especially the child welfare system. The CBCAP grantees are in a unique position of leadership as they assume responsibility for directing, leading and evaluating the network of public-private partnerships and the continuum of preventive services for children and families in their States. The emphasis on family support, family strengthening, parental involvement, and outcome accountability are consistent with the values promoted through the CFSR and CFSP planning processes. It is critical that multiple systems, especially entities providing prevention and early

intervention services, work in tandem with those providers who serve families with moderate and high risk child maltreatment in order to improve the safety, permanency and well-being of all children and families.

Training and Technical Assistance

If you are a CBCAP Lead Agency and would like to request and receive training or technical assistance from the FRIENDS National Resource Center, please feel free to contact your appropriate State T/TA Coordinator.

Resources

National Study on Differential Response in Child Welfare <http://www.friendsnrc.org/download/07confpres/arfinalreport.pdf>

Alternative Response: A Dialogue about the Current Context and Identifying Future Directions. www.friendsnrc.org/resources/07meet.htm

American Humane Association: Differential Response http://www.americanhumane.org/site/PageServer?pagename=pc_initiatives_differential

National Study of Child Protective Services Systems and Reform Efforts <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/CPS-status03/index.htm>

2007 CBCAP/PSSF Grantees Meeting

On April 17, 2007 at the 2007 CBCAP/PSSF Grantees Meeting in Portland, Oregon, Caren Kaplan, Director of Child and Family Protection of the Child Welfare League of America and FRIENDS partner, and Ying-Ying Yuan, Senior Vice President of Walter R. McDonald & Associates, Inc., conducted a presentation entitled *Alternative Response: A Dialogue about the Current Context and Identifying Future Directions* to the joint session of grantees

of Community Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP), Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSF), the State Liaison Officers (SLO), and the Children's Justice Act (CJA). This session provided a brief overview of Alternative Response across the nation and a description of selected statutory, policy, practice, service and data dimensions. The impetus for this presentation and subsequent discussion by participants was the CBCAP Grantees' interests and needs for additional information about Alternative Response and to obtain insights into the grantees' current level of involvement. In addition, this joint forum, in which the CBCAP, PSSF, SLO, and CJA representatives were together, had the potential to facilitate collective discussion and collaboration in this area.

The presentation, based substantially on the *National Study on Differential Response in Child Welfare* published by the American Humane Association and the Child Welfare League of America in November 2006⁶, addressed numerous issues that create misunderstanding of and confusion about Alternative Response Systems: different terminology, different definitions, different Models, different Services, different service providers, and continuous evolution of the practice.

Following the formal presentation, audience stakeholders participated in regional roundtable discussions of key issues that they were facing. A discussion guide (appended) was provided to each attendee. Participants were encouraged to either work in their state-specific groups or as a collective region. Approximately 45 minutes was provided for these discussions. The responses were recorded, collected and summarized.

This learning tool is based on these responses.

⁶ The Administration for Children and Families conducted a three-year effort to describe the child protection policies in place in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The resulting *National Study of Child Protective Services Systems and Reform Efforts* (2003) provided an initial baseline of differential response practices as identified by agency response.

**2007 CBCAP/PSSF GRANTEES MEETING
JOINT SESSION WITH CBCAP/PSSF/SLO/CJA
DISCUSSION GUIDE**

Please provide your name in the appropriate column below.

CBCAP	PSSF	SLO	CJA

PLEASE REVIEW YOUR STATE-SPECIFIC INFORMATION ON THE ACCOMPANYING TABLE AND THE DEFINITIONS OF TABLE COLUMN HEADERS.

1. To the best of your knowledge, does the information provided in the first 4 columns (excluding the column of states) accurately reflect the use of a *formal* alternative response system (also called dual track, multiple response, differential response) associated with your state/county child welfare agency?
2. If you answered "YES" to #1, please describe or amend the information in the table to more accurately reflect the current use of a *formal* alternative response approach in your state/county child welfare agency. By what name is it referred to?
3. To the best of your knowledge, does the information provided in the fifth column, entitled "Other Innovations in CPS" accurately reflect the use of other formal approaches, *outside the child welfare system*, that provide an alternative response to children and their families? [PLEASE NOTE: WE ARE NOT LOOKING TO IDENTIFY SPECIFIC SERVICES, BUT RATHER, A COMPREHENSIVE, COUNTY- OR STATEWIDE-APPROACH THAT RESPONDS TO AND ASSESSES THE NEEDS OF VULNERABLE CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES IN A NON-TRADITIONAL MANNER.]
4. If you answered "YES" to #3, please describe or amend the information in the table to more accurately reflect the current use of other formal approaches, *outside the child welfare system*, that provide an alternative response approach to children and their families. By what name is it referred to (e.g., Community Partnerships for Protecting Children)? [AGAIN, WE ARE NOT LOOKING TO IDENTIFY SPECIFIC SERVICES, BUT RATHER, A COMPREHENSIVE, COUNTY- OR STATEWIDE-APPROACH THAT RESPONDS TO AND ASSESSES THE NEEDS OF VULNERABLE CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES IN A NON-TRADITIONAL MANNER.]
5. Are you involved with alternative response associated with the child welfare agency, not associated with the child welfare agency, and/or associated with both?
6. How would you describe your involvement? (e.g., provision of services, funding, training, technical assistance, etc.)
7. In what ways could you become involved or further involved, both individually and collectively?
8. What kinds of support and/or technical assistance do you need to become involved or further involved with an alternative response approach in your state/county?

Differential Response in Child Welfare⁷

SNAPSHOT OF THE STATES

State	DR/CW Statewide	DR/CW Multiple Jurisdictions NOT Statewide	DR/CW Formal Pathway for Screened-Out Reports	DR/CW in Development	Other Innovation in CPS	DR/CW Non-Operational
Alabama						
Alaska		X				
Arizona						X
Arkansas						
California ⁸					Differential Response	
Colorado					Child Welfare and TANF Implementation for Prevention Purposes	
Connecticut					Hartford Community Partnership	
Delaware						X
District of Columbia					Community Collaboratives	
Florida		X	X	X	Community Partnerships for Protecting children	X
Georgia					Community Partnerships for Protecting children	
Hawaii	X					
Idaho						
Illinois					Integrated Assessment Program	
Indiana					Community Partners for Child Safety	
Iowa ⁹					Child Abuse Assessment & Community Partnerships for Protecting children	
Kansas						
Kentucky	X		X		Community Partnerships for Protecting children	
Louisiana		X		X		

⁷ The principle source of information provided in this table comes from the *National Study on Differential Response in Child Welfare* published by the American Humane Association and the Child Welfare League of America in November 2006. Source data was provided by states in Spring 2006. Supplemental information is captured from CBCAP applications. Highlighted states did not provide information for the study and thus, information is needed.

⁸ California Department of Social Services has established three pathways that are implemented by the county child welfare agencies. None of these pathways correspond to the definition of differential response (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2003). Therefore, although the pathways have some of the essential criteria, the approach is characterized as an innovation.

⁹ Iowa's response system, although not an alternative response, provides a formal pathway to refer the family to a community-based agency.

A l t e r n a t i v e R e s p o n s e S y s t e m s

SNAPSHOT OF THE STATES *(cont)*

State	DR/CW Statewide	DR/CW Multiple Jurisdictions NOT Statewide	DR/CW Formal Pathway for Screened-Out Reports	DR/CW in Development	Other Innovation in CPS	DR/CW Non-Operational
Maine					Community Partnerships for Protecting Children Community Intervention Program	
Massachusetts				X	Connecting Families	
Michigan					SDM: 5-category disposition	
Minnesota	X		X			
Mississippi						
Missouri	X		X		Community Partnerships for Protecting children	
Montana						
Nebraska						
Nevada ¹⁰						X
New Hampshire						
New Jersey					Child Welfare Service/ Assessment	
New Mexico ¹¹					Differential Response	
New York ¹²					Differential Response	
North Carolina	X					
North Dakota					Safety Strength Risk Assessment	
Ohio				X		
Oklahoma	X					
Oregon					Family Support and Connections	
Pennsylvania	X					
Rhode Island						
South Carolina						
South Dakota					Initial Family Assessment	
Tennessee	X		X			

¹⁰ Nevada has enabling legislation that allows for statewide use of formal alternative response. There are no broad efforts to initiate the system and lack of organizational capacity has resulted in limited success. *(Reclassified for this table; National Study characterizes Washoe County, NV as having an ARS.)*

¹¹ New Mexico's Differential Response is dedicated to meet the needs of families not screened in to the Child Protective Services System.

¹² New York's child abuse statute requires that a determination of suspected maltreatment be made and the perpetrator's name be entered into the central registry. Nonetheless, Westchester County is attempting to implement the other characteristics and elements of an alternative response county-wide.

A l t e r n a t i v e R e s p o n s e S y s t e m s

SNAPSHOT OF THE STATES *(cont)*

State	DR/CW Statewide	DR/CW Multiple Jurisdictions NOT Statewide	DR/CW Formal Pathway for Screened-Out Reports	DR/CW in Development	Other Innovation in CPS	DR/CW Non-Operational
Texas					Community Partnerships for Strengthening Families	X
Utah					Domestic Violence Pilot Project	
Vermont						
Virginia	X					
Washington	X		X			
West Virginia		X	X			
Wisconsin				X		
Wyoming	X					



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